

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Lonnie Johnson, Engineer and Inventor



*Persevere. That's what I always
say to people. There's no easy
route.*

It's a hot day in the middle of the summer. Your siblings are driving you crazy. That's when you grab your favorite summer toy, your Super Soaker, and attack. Who do you have to thank for this amazing toy? It's no other than Lonnie Johnson.

Lonnie Johnson was born on October 6, 1949 in Mobile, Alabama. At a young age he learned how to persevere. **Persevere** means to continue working towards a goal even when problems or difficulties occur. One way that Lonnie learned to persevere was by learning how to build toys with his father. By the time he was 13, he had built his own go-kart out of scraps from the local junkyard. He even attached a lawn mower motor to the go-kart so he could speed down the road.

Lonnie's dream was to become an inventor. He took things apart and experimented in the family's kitchen. He was smart and creative. He dreamed of being just like George Washington Carver, a famous Black scientist. Lonnie did not give up on his dream, even when his teachers told him that being a scientist was out of his reach. He continued to work hard throughout high school and even won a science fair for a robot that he had invented.

After graduating high school, he went to Tuskegee University. Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in

1973. Two years later, he earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering.

After graduating from Tuskegee University, Lonnie Johnson joined the United States Air Force. While serving in the United States Air Force, he helped develop the stealth bomber. He rose to the rank of captain.

Lonnie Johnson then went to work for NASA as an engineer for the Jet Propulsion Lab. During his time at NASA he worked on the Galileo mission, the Mars Observer project, and the Cassini Saturn project.

When Lonnie wasn't at work, he was experimenting and inventing. One day Johnson was working on a water heat pump when he was inspired to create a toy that would shoot out a stream of water. It was originally called the Power Drencher. Today it is called the Super Soaker. By 1991 Johnson's invention had made \$200 million dollars in sales and was the top selling toy of the year.

Today, Lonnie Johnson runs his own company, Johnson Research and Development. His company focuses on using technology to create products and developing environmentally friendly ways to generate power. His company has 100 patents for his inventions. A **patent** is a document that keeps others from copying an original invention or idea.

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1. The article gives one example of perseverance when Lonnie Johnson built toys as a child. Cite another example of perseverance.

2. Give an example from the text that supports the statement that Lonnie Johnson is intelligent.

3. Give an example from the text that supports the statement that Lonnie Johnson is creative.

4. What can you infer from the fact that Lonnie Johnson is working on developing environmentally friendly ways to generate power?
